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Granularity and symmetry in transliteration — a brief note

Studia Stemmatologica IX

Grand Hotel Terminus, Bergen
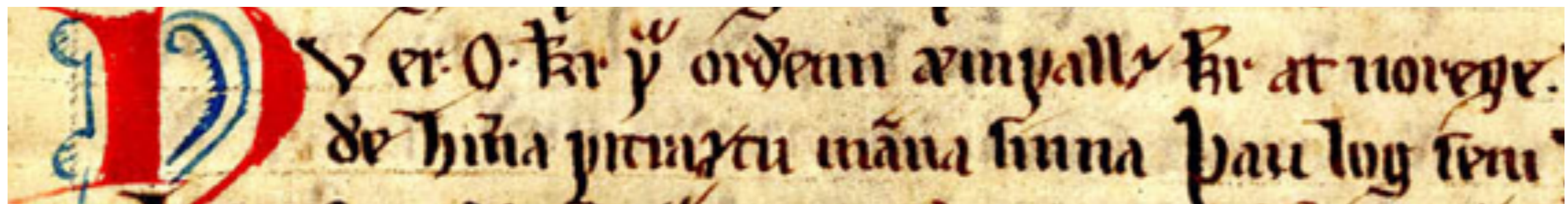
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Transcription

Rendering a primary source in an identical writing system.

For example, rendering a medieval manuscript written in Latin letters using the same inventory of Latin letters.

A question of granularity

Nv er · O · ꝃr ꝥ̊ orðenn æinᚠallz ꝃr at norege.

Nv er O*lafr* k*onung*r *var* orðenn æinvallz k*onung*r at norege.

Nú er Óláfr konungr var orðinn einvaldskonungr at Nóregi.

'Now that King Olaf had become the only king of Norway.'

ᚠᚢᚦᚨᚱᚲ → fuþark

Transliteration

Transferring a transcription in one writing system to another writing system.

For example, rendering a runic inscription in Latin letters.

A runic inscription

ᚼᛁᛚᛁᚠᛦ : ᛅᛚᚴᛦ : ᛒᛅᛦ : ᚠᛁᛋᚴᛅ : ᛁ : ᛦᛅᚢᚦᚢ : ᛋᛁᚼ

ailifr alkr bar fiska i rauþu sio

Eilífr Elk carried (ie. released) fish into Rauðusjór.

A question of symmetry

In Ancient Nordic, the ᚱ rune represented /r/ and can easily be transliterated by ‹ r ›, while the ᛉ rune represented /ʀ/ and is usually transliterated by ‹ ʀ ›.

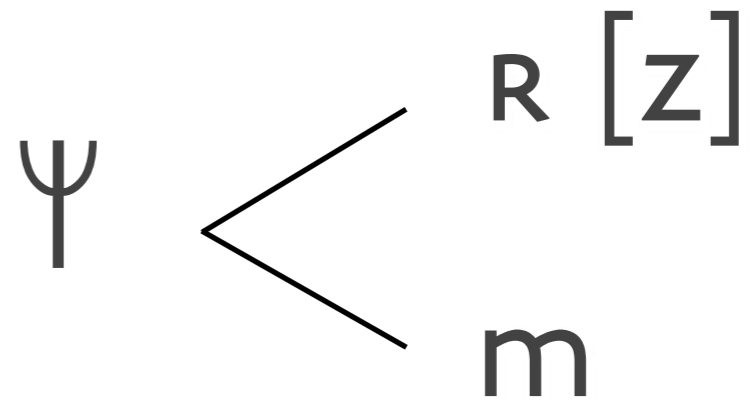After the Ancient Nordic period, /ʀ/ ᛉ merged with /r/ ᚱ.

Afterwards, the vacant ᛉ rune was taken into use for /m/ rather than the old ᛘ rune for /m/.

The symmetry was broken. The ᛉ rune was kept, but its representation changed from /ʀ/ to /m/.
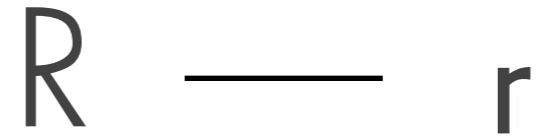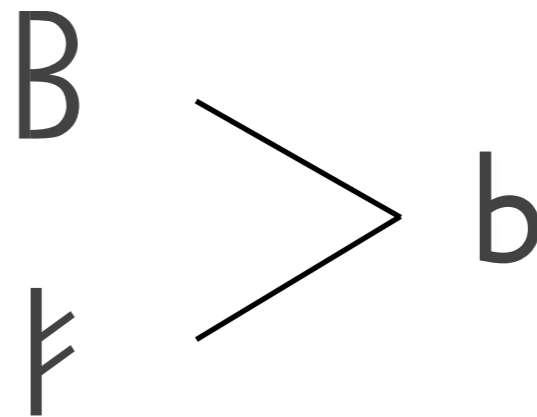
One to one   R ——— r

One to many $\Psi \diagup^{R\ [z]}_{\ m}$

Many to one $\overset{B}{\underset{\nvdash}{\diagdown}\!\!\diagup} b$

Some consequences

Complete symmetry between the characters of a writing system and the transliteration of these in another writing system is only possible when there is a one-to-one relation between characters and their phonological interpretations.

In all other cases, a text should always be accessible in its original writing system alongside the transliterated version.

A transliteration is useful, perhaps necessary, for any comparison between texts in different writing systems, but the transliteration needs to be specific about which state of the language it is based upon.

Normalisation for Comparison

Facsimile level   ᚼᛁᛚᛁᚠᛦ : ᛅᛚᚠᛦ : ᛒᛁᛦ : ᚠᛁᛋᚴᛅ : ᛁ : ᚱᛅᚢᚦᚢ : ᛋᛁᛅ

Diplomatic level   ailifr alkr bar fiska i rauþu sio

Normalised level   Eilífr bar fiska í Rauðusjó.

¶ Finis ¶